

ESSEX COUNTY COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN



Annual Report 2020

Commissioners

Paula Gomez Stordy, Chair (Middleton); Marianela Rivera, Vice Chair (Lawrence); Ogor Winnie Okoye, Secretary (Saugus); Geetha Rao Ramani, Commissioner (Andover); Sefatia Romeo Theken, Commissioner (Gloucester); Michaela Dunn, Commissioner (Amesbury); Sandy Almonte, commissioner (Methuen).

Mission

On August 3, 2010, former Governor Deval Patrick signed legislation establishing the Essex County Commission on the Status of Women (ECCSW) to advance the women of Essex County to full equality in all areas of life and to promote women's rights and responsibilities. The Essex County Commission on the Status of Women was formed in 2010 with a mission to study, review and report on the status of women in Essex County, and to provide a permanent, effective voice to advance the status of these women to full equality of all areas of life.

The goal of Essex County Commission on the Status of Women to uplift the voices of diverse women of Essex County and advocate for the health, safety, well-being, and economic advancement of women through community outreach, legislative advocacy, community hearings, and community education. We value equity, inclusion, and the leadership of women in all areas that impact their lives.

Advocacy

Which issues were brought up in public hearings? Which issues did the commission identify as the most important, and what did the commission do to address those issues? What state-wide legislation, if any, did the commission endorse and how does it fit into the commission's priorities?

This year, the commission prioritized legislative priorities of sexual harassment training in the workplace, supporting working parents running for public office, and an act relative to healthy youth to promote healthy relationships and sexuality education within public schools. We also planned to host a panel of Essex county women who have run for public office to be hosted at Northern Essex Community College in Lawrence, MA during the month of April. However, because of the global pandemic, COVID19, we had to cancel all in person meetings and events and the panel did not take place. The commission continued to meet via Zoom video conferencing. Mandatory social distancing state orders were in place to minimize exposure to the virus. Yet, an unintended consequence was increased isolation and decreased support to victims of domestic violence who were quarantined with their abusive partner. The commission decided to respond by increasing awareness of domestic violence services available to victims of domestic violence living in Essex County.

Programming

The Regional Commission implemented the following programming in fiscal year 2020:

In response to the increased isolation victims of domestic violence experienced during COVID19 state ordered quarantine mandates, the commission organized programming to increase the community's awareness of free and confidential domestic violence services within Essex County. We hosted a virtual panel, "Navigating the Scourge of Domestic Violence During COVID19". The panel featured Leadership of domestic violence programs within Essex County including: fellow Essex County commissioner, Director of Lawrence Police Community Relations, and founder of the domestic violence program Delamano, Sandy Almonte, Executive Director of Healing Abuse Working for Change, Sara Stanley, Executive Director of The Jeannie Geiger Crisis Center, Suzanne Dubus, of the YWCA Northern Massachusetts, Director of Community Based Domestic Violence and Sexual Violence Program Operations, Arelis Huerta. Addressing domestic violence aligns with the commission's priorities and values as domestic violence impacts the safety, health, economic stability, and advancement of women who are survivors of domestic violence and their children who are also impacted by witnessing and experiences abuse in the home. The virtual panel was a live streamed event via Facebook on Thursday May 28th. Panelists described the dynamics

of domestic violence, the impact of abuse, how to help a friend, and all available services their organizations offer. Individuals engaged by asking questions of the panelist. This was a successful event that reached more people we could have ever reached in person. To date, the video of this virtual panel has reached 3,122 people and has received 835 engagements. Because social media has a wide reach outside of Essex County, we followed up by posting statewide and national domestic violence hotline. We did receive feedback inquiring if we could host this event in Spanish. We hope to schedule a panel discussion with the bilingual panelist soon.

Goals for the next fiscal year

How does it build on the work already being done? What steps are necessary to achieve it and what resources (time, money, space) will it require? How will you know when you have achieved it?

Goal 1. Our first goal is to increase the membership of commissioners. Currently, we have seven commissioners and are looking to recruit three more. This will require coordinating with the Massachusetts Commission on the Status of Women to receive applications of prospective commissioners and onboarding them.

Goal 2. Our second goal is recruit volunteers and/or interns from local colleges who can assist in with administrative support and social media management of our Facebook and Instagram accounts. This will require identifying contacts within schools who oversee volunteer and internship opportunities in the local colleges and providing them with language to promote this opportunity. We will also post via our social media outlets. This will not require funding. This will support the commission's outreach to the community to provide information impacting women's lives.

Goal 3. Our third goal is to host another virtual event to provide the community with information that will enhance the safety, health, and economic advancement of women residents of Essex County. We would like to highlight the impact that institutionalized racism and other forms of oppression have in the lives of Essex County women and efforts to undo racism and oppression. We hope panelist can volunteer their time so that this event does not require funds.

Submitted by Paula Gomez Stordy on July 16, 2020.